CONSERVATION Showcase

Plant Materials Center Pushes Knowledge Into the Field

Fenchel demonstrates beaver auger to determine ground water depth

This spring, the Los Lunas Plant Materials Center (PMC), in a major push, carried its riparian restoration technology into the field. In a series of four workshops, the PMC offered key information about assessing and developing alternatives, and arriving at sound decisions when planning for these unique ecosystems. Greg Fenchel, Los Lunas Plant Material Center manager, was instrumental in teaching the techniques that have been developed and applied by him and his staff throughout New Mexico.

The limiting factor in the success of riparian plant restoration efforts, that the PMC emphasizes again and again, is water availability. Due to natural flooding cycles being historically disrupted by human activities, native riparian ecosystems may need a little help in re-establishing a presence in many of our flood plains. And, most riparian plants must get their feet wet to get established.

To determine the depth at which to set riparian plants into the ground so they can reach water, Fenchel demonstrated the use of a beaver auger to install shallow monitoring wells. Planting techniques were demonstrated at the workshops included electric rotary hammer drills to plant willows along a stream bank, and planting cottonwood poles and other deep potted plants with a farm tractor outfitted with a front end loader mounted auger.

The workshops transmitted information about many aspects on southwestern riparian ecosystems to the participants. Lessons provided the attending conservationists with useful information to continue our efforts in restoring these landscapes back to their natural setting.

Riparian and wetland landscapes make up less than one percent of our total land in New Mexico. Additionally, riparian habitats are home to our largest diversity of plants and animals with many of the animal species being classified as species of concern. By restoring these habitats we are benefitting future generations, and ensuring the footprint we leave behind reflects our best stewardship efforts.